

PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

From the INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

PCT

NOTIFICATION OF ELECTION

(PCT Rule 61.2)

To:

Commissioner
 US Department of Commerce
 United States Patent and Trademark
 Office, PCT
 2011 South Clark Place Room
 CP2/5C24
 Arlington, VA 22202
 ETATS-UNIS D'AMERIQUE
 in its capacity as elected Office

Date of mailing (day/month/year) 07 November 2000 (07.11.00)	
International application No. PCT/GB00/00412	Applicant's or agent's file reference COMMS
International filing date (day/month/year) 09 February 2000 (09.02.00)	Priority date (day/month/year) 09 February 1999 (09.02.99)
Applicant NORRIS, Daniel	

1. The designated Office is hereby notified of its election made:

☒ in the demand filed with the International Preliminary Examining Authority on:
04 September 2000 (04.09.00)

☐ in a notice effecting later election filed with the International Bureau on:

2. The election ☒ was
☐ was not

made before the expiration of 18 months from the priority date or, where Rule 32 applies, within the time limit under Rule 32.2(b).

The International Bureau of WIPO 34, chemin des Colombettes 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland Facsimile No.: (41-22) 740.14.35	Authorized officer S. Mafra Telephone No.: (41-22) 338.83.38
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**NOTIFICATION OF THE RECORDING
OF A CHANGE**

(PCT Rule 92bis.1 and
Administrative Instructions, Section 422)

From the INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

To:

RICKARD, Timothy, Mark, Adrian
Moon Beaver
24-26 Bloomsbury Square
London WC1A 2PL
ROYAUME-UNI.

Date of mailing (day/month/year) 09 March 2001 (09.03.01)	
Applicant's or agent's file reference COMMS	IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION
International application No. PCT/GB00/00412	International filing date (day/month/year) 09 February 2000 (09.02.00)

1. The following indications appeared on record concerning:

☐ the applicant
 ☐ the inventor
 ☒ the agent
 ☐ the common representative

Name and Address

State of Nationality

State of Residence

Telephone No.

Facsimile No.

Teleprinter No.

2. The International Bureau hereby notifies the applicant that the following change has been recorded concerning:

☐ the person
 ☐ the name
 ☐ the address
 ☐ the nationality
 ☐ the residence

Name and Address

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3. Further observations, if necessary:

An agent has been appointed.

4. A copy of this notification has been sent to:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the receiving Office	<input type="checkbox"/> the designated Offices concerned
<input type="checkbox"/> the International Searching Authority	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the elected Offices concerned
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> the International Preliminary Examining Authority	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

The International Bureau of WIPO 34, chemin des Colombettes 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland Facsimile No.: (41-22) 740.14.35	Authorized officer <p style="text-align: center;">Dominique DELMAS</p> Telephone No.: (41-22) 338.83.38
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PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

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RECD 26 JUN 2001

WIPO

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INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

Applicant's or agent's file reference COMMS		FOR FURTHER ACTION	See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/IPEA/416)
International application No. PCT/GB00/00412	International filing date (day/month/year) 09/02/2000	Priority date (day/month/year) 09/02/1999	
International Patent Classification (IPC) or national classification and IPC G06F17/60			
Applicant NORRIS, Daniel			
<p>1. This international preliminary examination report has been prepared by this International Preliminary Examining Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.</p> <p>2. This REPORT consists of a total of 5 sheets, including this cover sheet.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, i.e. sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis for this report and/or sheets containing rectifications made before this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions under the PCT).</p> <p>These annexes consist of a total of 4 sheets.</p>			
<p>3. This report contains indications relating to the following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Basis of the report II <input type="checkbox"/> Priority III <input type="checkbox"/> Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability IV <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of unity of invention V <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement VI <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Certain documents cited VII <input type="checkbox"/> Certain defects in the international application VIII <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Certain observations on the international application 			
Date of submission of the demand 04/09/2000		Date of completion of this report 20.06.2001	
Name and mailing address of the international preliminary examining authority:  European Patent Office - P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk - Pays Bas Tel. +31 70 340 - 2040 Tx: 31 651 epo nl Fax: +31 70 340 - 3016		Authorized officer FERNANDEZ FERRE..., M Telephone No. +31 70 340 4170 	

INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/GB00/00412

I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the **elements** of the international application (*Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)*):

Description, pages:

1-4 as originally filed

Claims, No.:

2-16 with telefax of 22/03/2001

1 with telefax of 31/05/2001

Drawings, sheets:

1/1 as originally filed

2. With regard to the **language**, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the language in which the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

These elements were available or furnished to this Authority in the following language: , which is:

- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of the international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).
- ☐ the language of publication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).
- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rule 55.2 and/or 55.3).

3. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international preliminary examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:

- ☐ contained in the international application in written form.
- ☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.
- ☐ The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.
- ☐ The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished.

4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT**

International application No. PCT/GB00/00412

- ☐ the description, pages:
☐ the claims, Nos.:
☐ the drawings, sheets:

5. ☐ This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed (Rule 70.2(c)):

(Any replacement sheet containing such amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this report.)

6. Additional observations, if necessary:

V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1. Statement

Novelty (N)	Yes:	Claims	1-16
	No:	Claims	
Inventive step (IS)	Yes:	Claims	
	No:	Claims	1-16
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes:	Claims	1-16
	No:	Claims	

2. Citations and explanations
see separate sheet

VI. Certain documents cited

1. Certain published documents (Rule 70.10)

and / or

2. Non-written disclosures (Rule 70.9)

see separate sheet

VIII. Certain observations on the international application

The following observations on the clarity of the claims, description, and drawings or on the question whether the claims are fully supported by the description, are made:
see separate sheet

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/GB00/00412

1 In the following reference may be made to the documents below:

D1: US-A-4 777 488 (CARLMAN JR PHILIP L ET AL) 11 October 1988 (1988- 10-11)

D2: US-A-4 807 095 (BELL GERALD) 21 February 1989 (1989-02-21)

D3: US-A-4 645 878 (HILGER WILFRIED ET AL) 24 February 1987 (1987-02- 24)

D4: DE 196 22 309 A (HARTZ NORBERT) 20 November 1997 (1997-11-20)

D5: US-A-4 250 491 (DOTSON ANDY S) 10 February 1981 (1981-02-10)

2 Claim 1 does not meet the requirements of Article 6 PCT in that the subject-matter for which protection is sought is not clearly defined. Claim 1 in an overly general manner, attempts to define the subject-matter in terms of the result to be achieved, which merely amounts to a statement of the underlying problem. The subject-matter of claim 1 relates to the use of a system whose technical features necessary for achieving this result in an inventive manner would have to be added. Since claim 1 (and its dependent claims 2-16) relates to the use of an unclear system it is therefore also unclear.

3 The application as a whole seems to relate to the use of a system with an intended application in conferences or other discussion fora, consisting of tables where participants sit and engage in discussion, the tables having some indicium or mechanism (eg. a display above the table as shown in figure 1, or a coloured table-top) which helps determine from a distance what topic is being discussed at each table, the indicia being operated either from a central station by remote control or locally. The anticipated use of such a system in a single specific environment is not considered to be sufficient in order to lend inventive step. Other environments with almost exactly the same requirements (high visibility, ready changeability, topic identification) such as restaurants, airport check-in desks (signs), queueing systems, etc, clearly share the features as defined. The definition that these will ensue some discussion is not pertinent to the technical content of the claims. Even considering this feature, an objection of lack of disclosure in the original application must be raised. The relevant technical features seem to be the table with its lit top, the mechanism to light it and change its colour, the display and a network communication system for having centralized control of the tables/indicia. There appears to be insufficient disclosure in the application as a whole of the technical features needed

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/GB00/00412

in order to obtain such a system. Given that the subject-matter for which protection is sought relates to the use of such a system, and that the technical features of the system are not sufficiently disclosed, it is not clear for what subject-matter protection is sought.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that communication systems with technical features similar to the system according to the application are known (see D1) and that tables with lit table-tops are also known (see D2).

If the person skilled in the art desired to attract attention visually over distance he or she may do so by lighting up (large) signs, using flags or other devices.

The person skilled in the art would combine the teaching of D1 and common sense (epitomised by -D2) to arrive at a system underlying the subject-matter of the application. Accordingly no inventive step is apparent.

Claims

1. The use of a communications system to facilitate meetings, conferences or forums by displaying and amending discussion or conversation topics to enable users to gather together at spaced apart locations to form groups to pursue a discussion or conversation by:
 1. providing an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion or conversation with one another,
 2. providing each location with indicia associated with a subject for discussion or conversation, and
 3. providing means for altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject

wherein:

the indicia are used to display discussion or conversation topics, and the indicia may be amended to display new discussion or conversation topics

the communications system comprises an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion or conversation with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion or conversation, and a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject.

2. A use as claimed in claim 1 wherein the communications system comprises a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at substantially all of the spaced apart locations.
3. A use as claimed in claim 1 wherein the remote control is replaced by a local electronic control at each location for altering the indicia at that location to indicia associated with a further subject.

4. A use as claimed in claim 1 wherein the communications system comprises a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at a location and a local control for locally altering the indicia at a location.
5. A use as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein at least one location comprises seating.
6. A use as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein at least one location comprises a table at which users may sit or stand.
7. A use as claimed in claim 1 wherein the communications system comprises a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at at least one location to indicia associated with a further subject, a local control for locally altering the indicia at a location and means for reporting to the remote control data associated with the indicia displayed at the location.
8. A use as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the communications system further comprises a display for displaying a plurality of the subjects currently for discussion.
9. A use as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the communications system further comprises a display for displaying all the subjects currently for discussion.
10. A use as claimed in claim 7 or claim 8 wherein the communication system further comprises means for the display to be altered by the remote control that alters the indicia at spaced apart locations.
11. A use as claimed in claim 7 or claim 8 wherein the communications system comprises means for altering the display from at least one of the spaced apart locations.
12. A use as claimed in claim 5 wherein the table has a top illuminatable in colour associated in a look up table with the subject to be discussed.

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13. A use as claimed in claim 5 wherein the table has a top illuminatable in colour associated by indicia with the subject to be discussed.
14. A use as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the communications system comprises indicia that are local to a plurality of locations and means for altering the indicia to enable users to identify a subject that is common to those locations.
15. A use as claimed in claim 13 wherein the communications system further comprises a display unit to display subjects that are common to a plurality of locations together with the subjects that are associated with each of those locations.
16. A use as claimed in any one of the preceding claims for the facilitation of meetings, conferences, forums, networking sessions, training sessions, educational programmes, entertainment and public consultations or by market researchers to constitute study groups for qualitative research or by media and news gathering organizations.

REPLACEMENT CLAIM ONE

Claims

1. The use of a communications system to facilitate meetings, conferences or forums by displaying discussion topics to enable users to gather together at spaced apart locations to form groups to pursue a discussion and by providing means to amend the topics displayed to display new discussion topics to set up new discussion groups by:

1. providing an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another,
2. providing each location with indicia associated with a subject for discussion, and
3. providing means for altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject

wherein:

the indicia are used to display discussion topics, and the indicia may be amended to display new discussion topics

the communications system comprises an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion, and a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject.

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INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification ⁷ : G06F 17/00	A2	(11) International Publication Number: WO 00/48086 (43) International Publication Date: 17 August 2000 (17.08.00)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB00/00412 (22) International Filing Date: 9 February 2000 (09.02.00) (30) Priority Data: 9902797.1 9 February 1999 (09.02.99) GB (71)(72) Applicant and Inventor: NORRIS, Daniel [GB/GB]; 24 Stanhope Avenue, Finchley, London N3 3LX (GB).		(81) Designated States: AE, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). Published <i>Without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report.</i>
(54) Title: A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND METHOD (57) Abstract This invention may be used to facilitate meetings, conferences and forums. Existing conference facilities do not support efficient networked communication. This invention is a programmable communications system that enables users to participate efficiently in structured and dynamic networked communication. The invention provides a communications system comprising an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion, and means for altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject. Further refinements are identified that increase the efficiency and functionality of the communications system as well as improving its user-interface.		

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ammended. (3) A new forum group can be set up by displaying a new topic or theme on a discussion topic sign.

In some embodiments of the invention more than one topic may be displayed on the same discussion topic sign. This sort of discussion topic sign may take the form of a map, diagram of the forum or a chart which can be used to indicate what is being discussed by more than one forum group.

In some embodiments of the invention a display is provided for displaying a plurality of the subjects currently for discussion. In some preferred embodiments of the invention a display is provided for displaying all of the subjects currently for discussion. In some embodiments means are provided for the display to be altered by the remote control that alters the indicia at the spaced apart locations. In some embodiments means are provided for altering the display from at least one of the spaced apart locations.

Locations in which forum groups are discussing similar types of subject may be clustered into named topic zones. This may be achieved by visually or physically linking together locations into zones. For example, locations may be physically clustered together into a topic zone which is named by some form of sign. Names of zones may be fixed or changeable. Names of topic zones may be changed by changing the sign associated with that topic zone.

In some embodiments of the invention indicia are provided that are local to a plurality of locations as well as means for altering the indicia to enable users to identify a subject that is common to those locations. In some embodiments of the invention a display unit is provided to display subjects that are common to a plurality of locations together with the subjects that are associated with each of those locations.

Topic zones may be fixed or changeable in terms of the number of locations they contain. This may be achieved by colour coding. For example users may be seated at tables which may each be lit in different colours. Changeable topic zones can be created by lighting tables in the same zone in the same colour.

In some preferred embodiments of the invention locations comprise a table at which users may sit or stand. In some embodiments of the invention tables have a top illuminatable in colour associated in a look up table with the subject to be discussed. This enables tables, at which users are discussing similar subjects, to be illuminated in the same colour. In some embodiments, indicia are provided that may be altered to associate discussion subjects with colours used to illuminate tables.

In some embodiments of the invention, the facility may be divided into named topic zones but may not utilize discussion topic signs.

In some embodiments of the invention the indicia comprise colour. So that indicia associated with similar subjects may display these subjects in the same colour.

This invention has some possible embodiments that arise from combinations and sub-combinations of the systems and methods described herein by reference to any one or more of the figures of which:

Figure 1 shows a table 1 which accommodates users and an electronic sign-board 2 which is used to display subjects for discussion. In some embodiments of the invention the electronic sign-board 2 can be altered remotely by a microcomputer. In some embodiments the electronic sign-board 2 can be operated locally by a keyboard 3. In some embodiments the electronic sign-board 2 can be operated both locally and remotely.

Figure 2 shows a plan view of a possible embodiment in which users are accommodated at loosely tessellated hexagonal tables. (this is not a scale diagram and spaces between tables would be greater than the appearance of the diagram suggests). Fig. 2 shows hexagonal tables 1 that are grouped into coloured zones in which users discuss similar subjects. Zones are identified by large electronic sign-boards 4. Surfaces of tables in the same zone are lit in the same colour. A table adjacent to a zone may therefore be added to a zone by illuminating its surface in the colour that codes for that zone.

Figure 3 is a view of a display unit. Electronic discussion topic sign-boards communicate with the display unit Fig 3 which provides an overview of the whole facility and shows what is being discussed at each table as well as displaying the names and colours of topic zones.

This invention has many possible embodiments that arise from combinations and sub-combinations of the systems and methods described thus far.

This invention includes the method of communication that arises from the use of the communications system described herein.

CLAIMS

1. A communications system comprising an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion, and a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject.
2. A communications system as claimed in claim 1 comprising a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at substantially all of the spaced apart locations.
3. A communications system comprising an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion and a local electronic control for altering the indicia at that location to indicia associated with a further subject.
4. A communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein at least one location comprises seating.

5. A communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein at least one location comprises a table at which users may sit or stand.
6. A communications system as claimed in claim 1 further comprising a local control for locally altering the indicia at a location and means for reporting to the remote control data associated with the indicia displayed at the location.
7. A communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further comprising a display for displaying a plurality of the subjects currently for discussion.
8. A communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further comprising a display for displaying all of the subjects currently for discussion.
9. A communications system as claimed in claim 7 or claim 8 wherein means are provided for the display to be altered by the remote control that alters the indicia at the spaced apart locations.

10. A communications system as claimed in claim 7 or claim 8 wherein means are provided for altering the display from at least one of the spaced apart locations.
11. A communications system as claimed in claim 5 wherein the table has a top illuminatable in colour associated in a look up table with the subject to be discussed.
12. A communications system as claimed in claim 5 wherein the table has a top illuminatable in colour associated by indicia with the subject to be discussed.
13. A communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims further comprising indicia that are local to a plurality of locations and means for altering the indicia to enable users to identify a subject that is common to those locations.
14. A communications system as claimed in claim 13 further comprising a display unit to display subjects that are common to a plurality of locations together with the subjects that are associated with each of those locations.

15. A communications system substantially as described herein by reference to any one or more of the figures.
16. A communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims wherein the indicia comprise colour.
17. A method of communications comprising providing a communications system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims for users to engage in discussion.
18. A method of communications substantially as described herein by reference to any one or more of the figures.

A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND METHOD

THE FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a communication system and method of communications. At least some embodiments of the invention may be used to facilitate meetings, conferences and forums. Some embodiments may be used as a form of entertainment or to enhance Internet cafés and leisure facilities. Some embodiments may be used to facilitate networking sessions, training sessions, educational programmes and public consultations. Some embodiments may be utilized by market researchers to constitute study groups for qualitative research. Some embodiments may also be used by media and news gathering organizations that require direct access to public opinion.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The Internet makes it easy for participants to set-up and join forum groups to communicate with other participants who share interests. No conference facility yet exists that provides an efficient framework which enables participants to do this in person. Existing conference facilities do not support efficient networked communication. In some embodiments, this invention is a programmable communications system that enables users to participate efficiently in structured and dynamic networked communication.

THE INVENTION

According to the invention there is provided a communications system comprising an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion, and means for altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject.

In some embodiments of the invention a remote control is provided for remotely altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject. In some preferred embodiments of the invention the remote control can alter substantially all the indicia at the spaced apart locations.

In some embodiments of the invention each location is provided with a local electronic control for altering the indicia at that location to indicia associated with a further subject.

Some embodiments of the invention comprise a remote control for remotely altering the indicia at a location and a local control for locally altering the indicia at a location and means for reporting to the remote control data associated with the indicia displayed at the location.

In some embodiments, the invention is a programmable forum that includes discussion topic signs (indicia). In the context of this invention a forum group is defined as a group of users who wish to pursue a particular discussion or conversation. Some embodiments of this invention may be set up in such a way as to enable users to gather together at the spaced apart locations to form forum groups. Accommodation may therefore be provided at the spaced apart locations to enable members of forum groups to sit together.

In some embodiments of the invention at least one location comprises seating. In some embodiments of the invention at least one location comprises a table at which users may sit or stand.

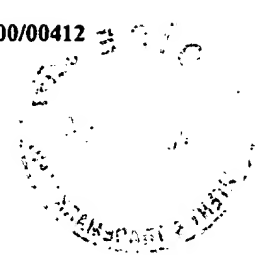
Discussion topic signs (indicia) are arranged within some embodiments of this invention in such a way that they indicate the type of discussion or conversation that forum groups wish to pursue. Users may be accommodated around or near discussion topic signs or other visual or symbolic means may be used to link discussion topic signs with specific locations.

Discussion topic signs (indicia) are used to display discussion topics or themes or conversation topics or themes. Discussion topic signs may use any means, any materials or any form of technology to display these things. Discussion topic signs may for example be: - electronic (e.g. using LED, LCD, plasma displays, VDU monitors or any other form of electronic display), they may be handwritten (e.g. on an electronic notepad), they may be mechanical or electromechanical or assembled using magnetic characters, they may be computer generated or optically generated (for example by projection).

In some embodiments of the invention, indicia comprising audio or video messages are used instead of text based discussion topic signs. These audio or video discussion topic signs consist of messages which are used to identify the discussion topic or theme or conversation topic or theme that is associated with a specific location.

Discussion topic signs may be amended to display new discussion topics, discussion themes or conversation themes. Discussion topic signs may be operated and amended by any known means such as: through a keyboard, by handwriting, by erasing, through a computer mouse, by touch screen, by assemblage of alphabetical characters and so on.

The following communication protocols are important features of some preferred embodiments of this invention: (1) A discussion topic sign is used to indicate the type of discussion or conversation that members of a forum group wish to pursue. (2) Information displayed on discussion topic signs can be altered, replaced or otherwise



1/1

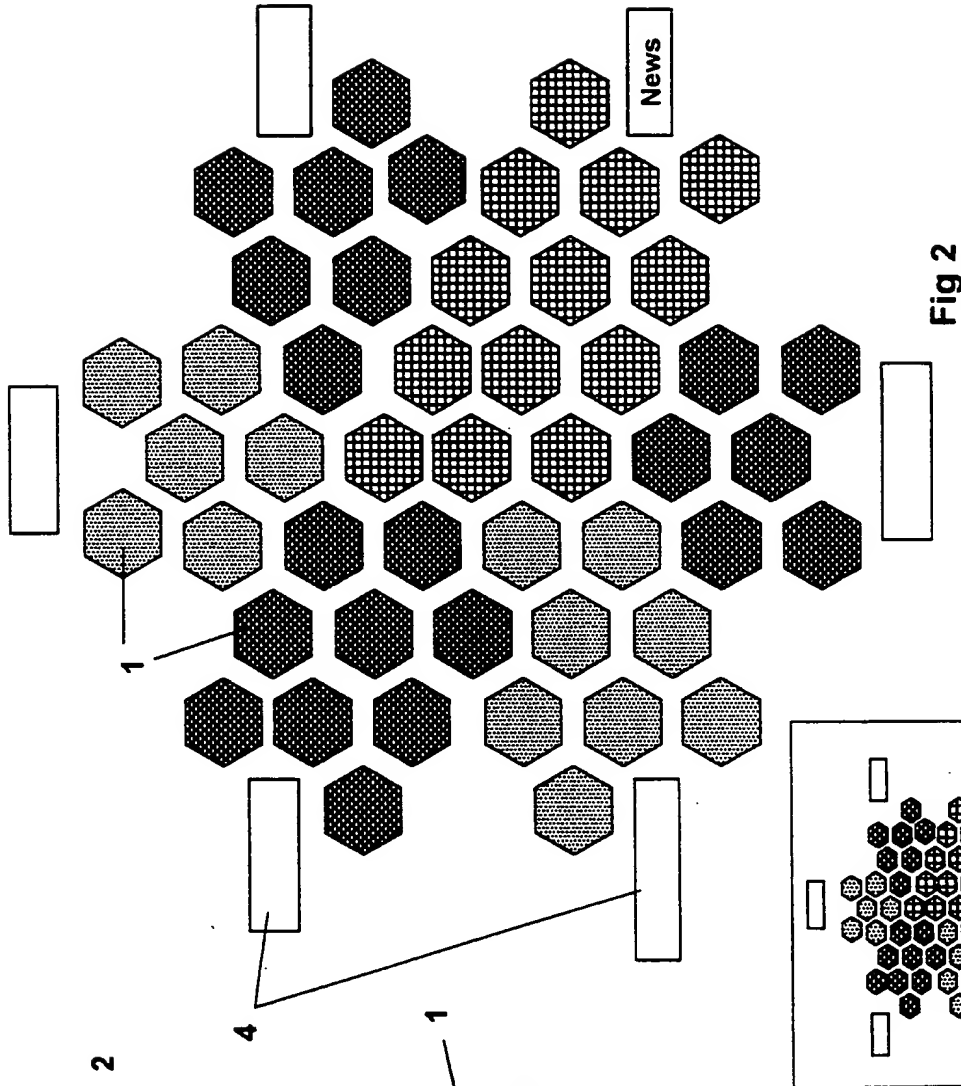


Fig 2

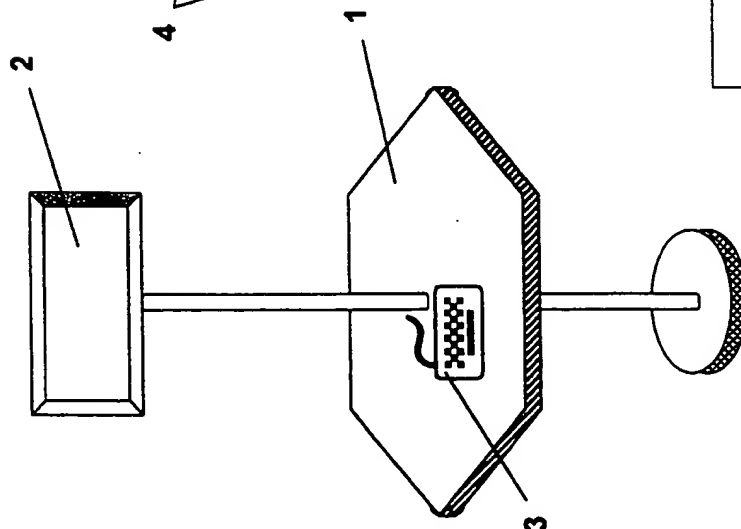


Fig 1

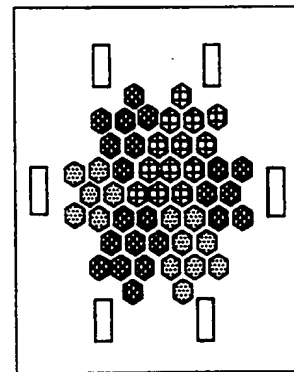


Fig 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 18 and Rules 43 and 44)

Applicant's or agent's file reference COMMS	FOR FURTHER ACTION see Notification of Transmittal of International Search Report (Form PCT/ISA/220) as well as, where applicable, item 5 below.	
International application No. PCT/GB 00/ 00412	International filing date (day/month/year) 09/02/2000	(Earliest) Priority Date (day/month/year) 09/02/1999
Applicant NORRIS, Daniel		

This International Search Report has been prepared by this International Searching Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 18. A copy is being transmitted to the International Bureau.

This International Search Report consists of a total of 3 sheets.

☒ It is also accompanied by a copy of each prior art document cited in this report.

1. Basis of the report

- a. With regard to the **language**, the international search was carried out on the basis of the international application in the language in which it was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

☐ the international search was carried out on the basis of a translation of the international application furnished to this Authority (Rule 23.1(b)).

- b. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international search was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing :

☐ contained in the international application in written form.

☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.

☐ the statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.

☐ the statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished

2. ☐ **Certain claims were found unsearchable** (See Box I).

3. ☐ **Unity of invention is lacking** (see Box II).

4. With regard to the **title**,

☒ the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.

☐ the text has been established by this Authority to read as follows:

5. With regard to the **abstract**,

☒ the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.

☐ the text has been established, according to Rule 38.2(b), by this Authority as it appears in Box III. The applicant may, within one month from the date of mailing of this international search report, submit comments to this Authority.

6. The figure of the **drawings** to be published with the abstract is Figure No.

☒ as suggested by the applicant.

☐ because the applicant failed to suggest a figure.

☐ because this figure better characterizes the invention.

1

☐ None of the figures.

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
17 August 2000 (17.08.2000)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 00/48086 A3

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: **G06F 17/60**

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(30) Priority Data:
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— With international search report.

(71) Applicant and

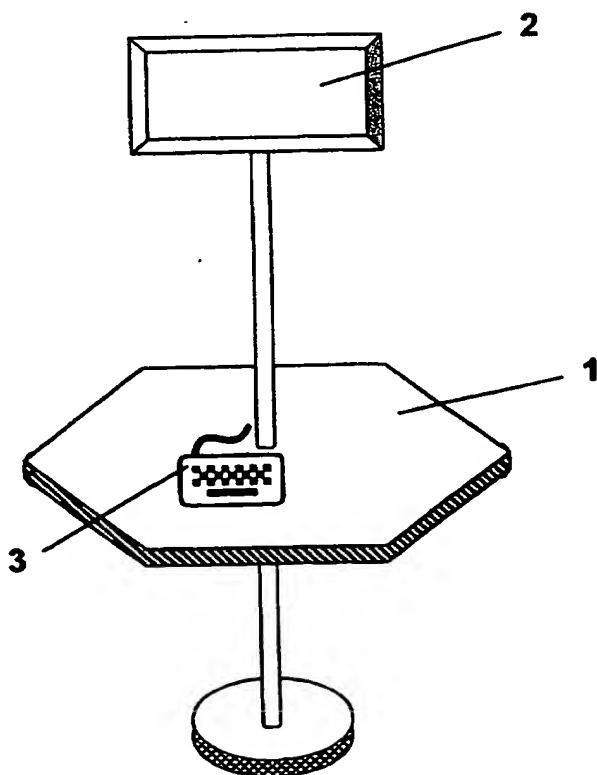
(72) Inventor: **NORRIS, Daniel [GB/GB]; 24 Stanhope Avenue, Finchley, London N3 3LX (GB).**

(88) Date of publication of the international search report:
8 March 2001

(81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL,

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: **A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND METHOD**



(57) Abstract: This invention may be used to facilitate meetings, conferences and forums. Existing conference facilities do not support efficient networked communication. This invention is a programmable communications system that enables users to participate efficiently in structured and dynamic networked communication. The invention provides a communications system comprising an array of spaced apart locations at each of which a plurality of users may enter into discussion with one another, each location being provided with indicia associated with a subject for discussion, and means for altering the indicia at at least a location to indicia associated with a further subject. Further refinements are identified that increase the efficiency and functionality of the communications system as well as improving its user-interface.

WO 00/48086 A3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/GB 00/00412

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 G06F17/60

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 G06F H04L A47B H02B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 4 777 488 A (CARLMAN JR PHILIP L ET AL) 11 October 1988 (1988-10-11)	1-10, 15-18
Y	abstract; figures 1,2 column 1, line 43 - line 63 column 2, line 28 - column 3, last line	11-14
Y	US 4 807 095 A (BELL GERALD) 21 February 1989 (1989-02-21) abstract; figures 1,4 column 2, line 23 - column 3, line 20	11-14
A	US 4 645 878 A (HILGER WILFRIED ET AL) 24 February 1987 (1987-02-24) abstract; figures 1-3,10,11 column 1, line 19 - line 23 column 2, line 40 - column 4, line 46 column 7, line 65 - column 8, line 29	1-10, 13-18
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

E earlier document but published on or after the international filing date

L document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

O document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

T later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

X document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

Y document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

Z document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

13 December 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

21/12/2000

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Authorized officer

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

onal Application No

PCT/GB 00/00412

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	DE 196 22 309 A (HARTZ NORBERT) 20 November 1997 (1997-11-20) abstract page 1, column 1, line 1 -column 2, line 30	1-10, 12-18
A	US 4 250 491 A (DOTSON ANDY S) 10 February 1981 (1981-02-10) abstract; figure 1 column 1, line 39 - line 58	1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

information on patent family members

Patent Application No

PCT/GB 00/00412

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 4777488 A	11-10-1988	GB 2190526 A,B	18-11-1987
US 4807095 A	21-02-1989	NONE	
US 4645878 A	24-02-1987	DE 3403345 A EP 0150852 A	01-08-1985 07-08-1985
DE 19622309 A	20-11-1997	NONE	
US 4250491 A	10-02-1981	NONE	